

Two wheels rule!



GRANOLAPARK —

Dear Readers,

The Takoma Park city council are such geeks! We'll bet that right now they are checking out the storm drains, street-lamps, recycling programs, and budget processes of whatever city, town, or village they are vacationing in.

Unfortunately geekdom is contagious. Your Gilbert found himself turning his relaxing holiday into a bike-lane and traffic-calming fact-finding mission.

So, we're submitting our travel expenses to the city, along with the following report.

Dear City Council,

Attached is a list of receipts for travel, meals, lodging, court costs, and other expenses.

The following report will aid the city in its quest for a Sustainable, Livable Community, and Engaged, Responsive, and Service-Oriented Government*.

So, you want to make Takoma Park more bike-able, with less automobile traffic, and more traffic calming? Check out the Netherlands!

The Netherlands? More like "the Peddlelands!" There are more bikes than cars in view at any given time in that country. Amsterdam has the world's biggest bicycle parking garage – able to accommodate 7000 bikes. More stolen bicycles are dredged out of Netherlands canals daily than are owned in all of Takoma Park**.

It is a bicyclist's paradise, which has physical and psychological effects. Lives spent pedal-pumping are fit ones. Finding an obese Netherlander is difficult – almost everyone is skinny. In addition, gay marriage being legal in the Netherlands, it is obvious that decades of bike-riding have also made the Dutch easy-going and equanimous.

Ahem, . . . what a fine example of a Sustainable, Livable Community with an Engaged, Responsive, and Service-Oriented Government.**

How, then, can we make Takoma Park more like Utrecht? Your Gilbert has a plan!

1) Get priorities straight. Bikes, public transport, cars – in that order. Put the bike lanes where people want to go – to and through the hearts of shopping districts and other popular destinations. Turn a quarter or a third of road-width over to bike lanes and bike parking. Wherever the most cars drive through town now – that's where the bike lanes go. Here, bikes are shunted off to less-traveled streets and back-routes that skirt shopping areas, etc.

- 2) Make the lanes more distinct. In the Netherlands the bike lanes are distinguished from the car lanes and sidewalk in various ways, not just painting a white line down the street as we do here. They use median strips or dividers, different materials and colors. In some places bike, pedestrian, and car lanes are at slightly different heights.
- 3) Bike lanes should have their own stop signs and other signage, and In heavy traffic areas, traffic lights.
- 4) Integrate bike lanes and bus lanes/stops into road design, For instance at big intersections the bike lane doglegs to the center line (in front of cars) so bikes can cross the intersection to make a left turn.
- 5) Get rid of the speed bumps – we didn't see ONE in the Netherlands. You want traffic calming? Turn half of every avenue, street, and lane to bicycles and scooters.
- 6) If you MUST have speed bumps, replace with speed lumps. We spotted some in London, UK. These are the same height as speed bumps, but placed in a row across a road. The spaces between allow bicycles, other two-wheeled vehicles, and emergency vehicles with wider wheelbase to pass. They have a gentler rise so they don't pack the same shock that many Takoma Park speed bumps do. They can be made of plastic material instead of asphalt. Or speed bumps can be refashioned into lumps.
- 7) Flatten out all the hills. They don't allow hills in the Netherlands, it would be bad for bicycle riding.
- 8) Ditch all those fancy bikes with the gears, handlebar brakes, racing handlebars, etc. Get good ol' 1- or 3-speed bikes with coaster-brakes. Ditch the bike helmets, too.
- 9) Toss the clunky helmets and neon-bright clothing. They make you look like a nervous norvis. And don't wear those spandex bike pants and the rest of the bicycling clown-suit. Make bicycling into a normal activity done by normal people in normal clothing. Puh-leeze!



Amsterdam: The bike lane is clearly defined © 2011 Voice
and separated from car traffic by a median
strip and barriers. It is also a different color
and material than either the car/trolley lane
and the sidewalk. Note the wide sidewalk - for
parking bicycles.



Amsterdam: Parked bicycles. Most are sturdy,
no-frills models. Many have large bike-
carriers, baskets, and child seats.



Amsterdam: Scooters and motor bikes also use the bike lanes.

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Amsterdam: Not a car in sight on this street in the middle of the city - only bikes, pedestrians, a trolley, and a delivery van. Note again the wide sidewalk for bike-parking.



Amsterdam: Oh, and we're going to have to build some canals in Takoma Park. The bridges and iron fences around them are useful to chain bikes to.



Amsterdam: This is a bicycle parking facility that holds up to 7000 bikes. It was full - overflowing, in fact.



Utrecht: Bike lane on a major street in downtown Utrecht. The little traffic light is for the bicyclists. There is a median strip between sidewalk and bike lane, and the bike lane is a different color than the auto lane. There are bike lanes on the other side of the street as well.



Utrecht: Scrutinize this and all the other pictures and count the helmets, spandex bike shorts, and reflective garments. Zero, zero, and zero. Now count the dead and injured bicyclists. Zero.



Utrecht: See? We definitely need canals! Especially if they have little doors and windows on the sides. By the way, there was a lot of small-boat traffic, but nary a life-jacket in sight!



A "cargo" bike. Check out the video on the manufacturer's web site and count the number of children wearing helmets in the video. Not recommended for American parents with nervous, overprotective tendencies.

Cargo bike website



Utrecht: A bike with more traditional child seating. And a basket to stuff infants in. The enclosed chain is a common feature on Dutch bicycles.



Utrecht: This roundabout (traffic-circle) bike lane is given almost half the road-width! Move OVER, cars!



Utrecht: Here the sidewalk, bike lane, and car lanes are each on a different level - not to mention different material/texture/color. Bike parking has been provided on a bump-out to the left. Looks like about 15 parked bikes take up the same room as one parked car. There's another scooter sharing the bike lane.



Utrecht: Here, the bicycle lane crosses to the middle of the street as it approaches an intersection. On the other side of the intersection bikes can turn either left or right. A lot of bike-friendly planning and construction went into this.



Utrecht: On a smaller street, the bike lane is still clearly separated from the sidewalk by material, texture, and color. And there's a tree-lined median between the bikes and cars.



Utrecht: Again, bike lane separated from car lane by a median, and it's a different color to make it even clearer. Again, the space between sidewalk and bike lane is bike parking. Almost as much width is given to bikes and bike parking as to the car lanes.



Utrecht: Cars must leave room at this intersection for bikes turning left. Have you noticed that almost all of the people in these pictures are skinny and fit? Obesity rates are much lower in the Netherlands. And if we take all the steps outlined in this report, they will be in Takoma Park, too!



London: (artist's recreation) These speed lumps are made of plastic materials. The spaces between them allow for bicycles, scooters, motorcycles, and emergency vehicles (with wide wheel bases).

- Gilbert

*Buzz words from the city's Strategic Plan, dutifully quoted in every grant, budget, and aid request. We know how to play this game!

** We made that statistic up, but we bet it's true.